

30 July 1952

OWI CONTRIBUTION TO NIE-35/2:  
PROBABLE DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA

1

I.A.1. The current situation in Indochina with respect to combat operations in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

Combat operations on land are currently characterized by a lull in heavy fighting in Tonkin between the Franco-Vietnamese forces and the Viet Minh, and by guerrilla-type warfare elsewhere in Indochina. The Viet Minh are presently taking advantage of the rainy season (June to October) to carry out rice raids in the Tonkin delta area and small scale attacks elsewhere, especially in Annam, where heavy rains will not start until September. However, with the return of good weather in the autumn, the Viet Minh are expected to resume heavy attacks in Tonkin. On the sea and in the air the French continue to maintain undisputed control because the Viet Minh lack both a navy and an air force. During the rainy season the use of naval craft for transport and fire support becomes more valuable. Because of the receipt of increased numbers of US naval craft, the French will be able to operate in the wet weather more effectively than last year. However, increased use of naval mines by the Viet Minh could materially reduce this advantage in naval craft.

I.A.1. a. What trends have there been in the past six months in the relative military strength, combat effectiveness, and tactical disposition of the French-Indochinese and Viet Minh forces?

French naval personnel in Indochina as of 10 June 1952 consisted of 633 officers and 9,760 enlisted men, making a total of 10,393 or about 800 less than six months ago. This decline is accounted for by the temporary absence of the CVL ARROMANCHES and its escort the DD LE MALIN from Indochina.

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- 1 -

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JUL 31 1952  
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waters for overhaul in France. The absence of ARROMANCHES does not seriously affect the relative strength of the remaining French naval forces, as air operations at this time of the year are greatly curtailed by the weather. ARROMANCHES and a replacement for the DD LE MALIN are scheduled to return to Indochina in September 1952, so as to be available for air operations with the return of good flying weather. No other significant change has occurred in French naval strength in the past six months.

French naval forces have been relatively effective in conducting amphibious raids against Viet Minh-held coastal areas, in providing logistical and gunfire support to ground troops, in maintaining a coastal blockade, and in conducting maritime surveillance operations. Present French naval forces, however, would be unable effectively to combat the increased use of mines, submarines, or aircraft.

The tactical disposition of naval craft varies with the operations being conducted. The larger vessels are assigned to surveillance and blockade duty, while amphibious craft are generally equally divided between the Tonkin and Mekong deltas. Most of the vessels are active, and crews rotate from vessel to vessel to permit necessary repairs.

(For French naval order of battle in Indochina, see ONI Contribution to NIE-35/1.)

Although a National Vietnamese Navy was established on paper as of 1 January 1952, there is as yet no actual organization. At present there are 10 officer candidates and about 400 native volunteers training aboard French naval craft; additional officer candidates are to be trained in France and in Vietnam, while other Vietnamese enlisted personnel are being trained ashore at the new naval training center at Nha Trang and should be available after 1 January 1953. No navy is contemplated for Cambodia or land-locked Laos.

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- I.A.I.b.(1) - What are the present French-Indochinese capabilities to expand their area of control and inflict heavy losses on the Viet Minh, assuming the present nature and degree of Chinese Communist assistance to the Viet Minh?

By full use of their existing naval forces in conjunction with ground forces, the French-Indochinese have the capability of moderately expanding their areas of control and could possibly inflict sizable losses on the enemy, assuming the present nature of Chinese Communist assistance to the Viet Minh. Furthermore, since the Viet Minh lack a navy, the French are capable of continuing control of the coastal waters and their missions of rendering logistical and fire support to ground troops. They can likewise conduct maritime surveillance and maintain the coastal blockade. If expanded operations should require a considerable increase in naval support, French naval proficiency would suffer due to shortages of personnel and inadequate repair and maintenance facilities. However, some improvement may develop when Vietnamese trainees become available for duty after 1 January 1953.

- (2) - What are the present French-Indochinese capabilities to hold presently occupied territory against the Viet Minh operating with the present nature and degree of Chinese Communist aid?

Under the above conditions, present French naval forces are sufficient to support ground forces holding presently occupied territory against the Viet Minh.

- (3) - What are the present French-Indochinese capabilities to resist attacks by the Viet Minh operating with substantially increased Chinese Communist aid?

French naval units are capable of giving expanded short-term support to the ground forces if the Chinese Communists substantially increase aid to the Viet Minh. However, should Chinese Communist aid include large numbers of marine mines, French naval forces would experience considerable difficulty in successfully carrying out expanded support activities.

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- (4) - What are the present French-Indochinese capabilities to resist attacks by combined Viet Minh-Chinese Communist combat forces?

Chinese Communist intervention in force to aid the Viet Minh would largely neutralize French naval operations. Moreover, if such intervention included troops as well as aircraft, submarines and the use of marine mines, the French Navy would almost certainly be forced to abandon Tonkin.

- I.A.4. - What is the current situation in Viet Minh held territory, including morale, food supply, armaments production, relations with the Chinese Communists, manpower resources, and extent and effectiveness of controls?

Although the Viet Minh sustained considerable casualties during the Hoa Binh assaults and more recently in the Tonkin delta clean-up operations, there is no evidence that their forces have suffered a general lowering of morale. Some defections from Viet Minh units have been reported, but not on a wide scale. However, a chronic shortage of food faces the Viet Minh, because the French hold the largest rice-producing areas. The Viet Minh produce small arms locally, including bazookas, mortars and ammunition. Moored controlled river mines are manufactured by the Viet Minh in the Saigon area of southern Vietnam.

Relations between the Viet Minh and Communist China are apparently good. The Chinese Communists continue to maintain a flow of military supplies to Viet Minh troops in Indochina, and have assigned technical advisers and specialists to Viet Minh military units.

The Viet Minh draws upon the same manpower pool as does the legal national government, but large losses inflicted by the French during the past six months have seriously depleted the Viet Minh ranks.

The Viet Minh government continues to maintain rigid and effective control of the population within its areas.

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Approved For Release 2000/08/29 : CIA-RDP79R01012A001000040003-2

I.B. What is the current nature and level of Chinese Communist aid to the Viet Minh?

There have been various low grade reports that the Chinese Communists have trained Viet Minh personnel in China in the operation of small craft and possibly submarines. There is no evidence that the Chinese Communists have supplied either mines or small craft. There have been reports, however, that the Viet Minh have used fast PT-type boats, possibly supplied by the Chinese Communists, to ferry supplies from Hainan.

I C.I. What is the current nature and level of French military support to the Associated States of Indochina?

The French believe that the major part of the military manpower burden can eventually be shifted to a native armed force of the Associated States, trained by the French and supplied and equipped by the US. Accordingly, the French are instructing naval officer candidates aboard French vessels and training enlisted men at Nha Trang and on amphibious craft. The Vietnamese have no naval force, and it is unlikely that the training of Vietnamese naval personnel will progress sufficiently by mid-1953 to permit any French vessels to be completely manned and officered by Vietnamese.

I.D.1. What is the current nature and level of US military support to the French and Indochinese?

Under MDAP, a total of 88 million dollars in material aid was programmed for the French naval forces in Indochina, through fiscal year 1952, of which about 75 per cent was delivered by 31 May 1952. The program for fiscal year 1953 will be approximately 47.7 million dollars. These figures do not cover the costs of shipping and delivery. In addition, the French

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SECRET  
SECURITY INFORMATION

Approved For Release 2000/08/29 : CIA-RDP79R01012A001000040003-2

naval forces in Indochina will benefit from the US aid program to France, which will permit the temporary assignment of some French vessels and equipment to Indochina.

Amphibious and small patrol craft used by the French in Indochina were largely furnished by the US. Their operation is therefore dependent upon continued US aid in the form of technical guidance, spare parts, replacement equipment and munitions.

During the past two years the French have received more vessels and aircraft than they have been able to man and maintain. Consequently, future aid will largely consist of river craft to maintain operations on the current level. Additional aid will also include vessels and equipment for anti-submarine and mine warfare, utility craft to aid in maintaining vessels received, and electronic, engineering and maintenance equipment.

II.A.1.a. How will French and Indochinese will and intention to resist be affected by military developments in Western Europe, and within metropolitan France and the French Union?

The French will continue to consider their commitments in Indochina as distinctly subordinate to their major European and North African interests. The French will remain highly sensitive to political and military implications, the development and strength of NATO, and to any indications of change in US-UK attitudes. The French will also remain highly sensitive to internal political and economic developments, but these will hinge largely upon the general European atmosphere. Barring drastic military moves by the Communist powers in Europe or general political upheavals in Europe or Africa, France will probably continue to maintain her present course in Indochina. So long as the French do so, the Indochinese will probably continue their resistance.

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II.A.1.b. How will French and Indochinese will and intention to resist be affected by political and economic trends within Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, including attitudes toward French imperial control and toward the Chinese Communists?

The nationals of Vietnam and Cambodia are highly sensitive to the degree and type of control exerted by the French; the Laotians are less concerned. Reluctance to admit the necessity of any French control keeps many Cambodians and Vietnamese from participating in the French-supported governments, and has driven others into open rebellion or defection to the Viet Minh. The current trend appears to be toward a gradual lifting of French controls. However, there is no certainty that this will induce the fence-sitters or extreme nationalists to support the present pro-French governments.

The Tam administration currently in power in Vietnam appears to be making much needed political, economic and military reforms. These moves, if reasonably successful, may win increasing support from the Vietnamese. Political uncertainties as well as widespread disruption of normal industry and agriculture continue to impede economic recovery. Attacks and sabotage by Viet Minh followers are also a disrupting factor.

There is little indication that Vietnamese fear or hatred of the Chinese plays as important a role in encouraging or discouraging support of the Bao Dai government as fear or hatred of the French. It is their somewhat blind rejection of French rule or leadership that prevents many Viet nationalists from supporting Bao Dai, whom they consider a French puppet. They are inclined to admire the Chinese Communists, who they feel have thrown out the "European imperialists." Few Indochinese have sufficient comprehension of Communist doctrines to understand what a Viet Minh victory would mean to Indochina.

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II.A.1.c. How will French and Indochinese will and intention to resist be affected by possible tripartite warnings to the CC to keep their troops out of Indochina?

If accompanied by evidence that it would be backed by force, a tripartite warning to the Chinese Communists to keep their troops out of Indochina should tend to stiffen the will and intention of the French and the Indochinese to continue the struggle against the Viet Minh.

II.A.1.d. How will French and Indochinese will and intention to resist be affected by changes in the level of US military aid and in the nature of the US commitment for the defense of Indochina?

A noticeable lessening of US aid might have a catastrophic effect on the will and intention of both French and Indochinese to combat the Viet Minh. Any increase in the level of US aid would stiffen the will and intention of the French and Indochinese, provided the increase were not matched by corresponding Chinese aid to the Viet Minh. The present nature of US assistance, with its emphasis on material aid, appears to be the only kind acceptable to the French.

II.A.1.e. How will French and Indochinese will and intention to resist be affected by a cease-fire in Korea?

A cease-fire in Korea would very likely cause the French and Indochinese to be apprehensive concerning increased Chinese intervention in Indochina.

II.A.1.f. How will French and Indochinese will and intention to resist be affected by an expansion of the Korean war?

An expansion of the Korean war probably would be viewed by the French and Indochinese as favorable to their interests insofar as it might restrict Chinese Communist aid to the Viet Minh.

SECRET  
SECURITY INFORMATION

Approved For Release 2000/08/29 : CIA-RDP79R01012A001000040003-2



SECRET

SECURITY INFORMATION

Approved For Release 2000/08/29 : CIA-RDP79R01012A001000040003-2

II.A.1.g. How will French and Indochinese will and intention to resist be affected by military developments elsewhere in Southeast Asia?

Both the French and the Indochinese would be sensitive to major political and military developments elsewhere in Southeast Asia, particularly in Burma, Malaya, and Thailand. Any marked successes of the Communists in those countries, with or without the direct interference of the Chinese Communists, would greatly influence the fence-sitters in Indochina and would contribute to the weakening of such popular support as is presently accorded to Bao Dai.

II.A.2.a.(1) and (2) What trends in French-Indochinese capabilities to resist or reduce Viet Minh-Chinese Communist pressure are probable in trained manpower, organized forces, and material supply (including US aid)?

Naval capabilities of the French can be expected to decline somewhat during the remainder of 1952 and then improve gradually. French naval capabilities have not increased sufficiently to meet expanded naval logistical support requirements, and trained Vietnamese naval personnel to help alleviate this situation will not be available until January 1953. If planned redeployment of minesweepers and increased training in minesweeping are carried out, they will improve mine defense capabilities. Other naval functions can be expected to show a steady deterioration during the remainder of 1952 due to insufficient personnel and inadequate repair facilities.

The French naval forces will continue to be deficient in their capability of waging anti-aircraft and anti-submarine warfare.

By mid-1953, assuming current aid to the French is maintained, the naval situation will be somewhat improved. Naval training of native Vietnamese now in progress will improve the personnel situation and allow activation of

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SECURITY INFORMATION

SECRET  
SECURITY INFORMATION

Approved For Release 2000/08/29 : CIA-RDP79R01012A001000040003-2

additional naval logistical units to support strengthened ground forces.

Ability to combat mine warfare should be somewhat increased with the receipt of minesweeping equipment and craft the French now lack. The shortage of trained personnel, however, will limit the improvement.

II.B.1.a. What trends in Viet Minh-Chinese Communist capabilities are probable through mid-1953 assuming a continuation of the present situation in Korea, in terms of trained Viet Minh manpower?

While no naval personnel as such are likely to be available to the Viet Minh during this period, the Viet Minh can be expected to train personnel in more effective methods for counteracting French naval support of land operations, particularly in the use of naval mines.

II.B.1.b. In terms of Viet Minh ability to utilize effectively heavy military equipment and to coordinate in combat all of their organized forces?

The Viet Minh can be expected to increase the quantity and employment of small field pieces and bazookas against naval craft in river operations. There is little likelihood the Viet Minh will acquire naval vessels to combat the Franco-Indochinese forces.

II.B.1.c. In terms of Chinese Communist abilities to provide an increased volume of technical and material assistance?

It is probable the Chinese Communists will still be so absorbed in the development of their own naval forces that they will be reluctant or unable to give much naval aid to the Viet Minh. It is possible that during the ensuing year the Chinese Communists will produce the simpler types of marine mines and, barring a change in the naval situation on the China coast, will be able to spare a portion of this production to the Viet Minh. The Chinese may also attempt to increase water-borne transport of military supplies to the Viet Minh.

SECRET  
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II.B.1.d. In terms of Chinese Communist ability to commit combat forces in Indochina?

During the past six months the Chinese Communist Navy has increased its strength in the following ways:

- (a) naval personnel have been trained: perhaps 5,000;
- (b) motor torpedo boat strength has been brought up to at least 35;
- (c) many more armed motor junks have been made operational;
- (d) orthodox naval vessels have been more active and willing to put to sea;
- (e) several available vessels, particularly landing craft, have been adapted to mine-laying.

It is probable that these trends will continue during the ensuing year, and it may therefore be concluded that there will be a gradual increase in the naval potential the Chinese Communists could commit to combat in Indochina.

It is still considered doubtful the Chinese Communists are operating any submarines, but, in view of the report that they have been training crews for two or more years, the possibility that they may receive and operate ex-USSR submarines grows steadily stronger.

II.B.2. What effect would an expansion of the war in Korea or a cease-fire in Korea have on Communist capabilities in Indochina?

A cease-fire in Korea would have little effect on the ability of the Chinese Communists to employ naval forces in Indochina because their naval forces are not being employed in Korean operations. Nor would their pre-occupation with coastal security patrols and their naval defensive and offensive capabilities vis-a-vis Formosa be appreciably lessened.

II.B.3.e How will Viet Minh courses of action be affected by political and military developments elsewhere in Southeast Asia?

The Viet Minh will be sensitive to political and military developments

SECRET

SECURITY INFORMATION

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elsewhere in Southeast Asia. They will capitalize fully on any increase in Communist strength in the area, in their propaganda in Indochina. A substantial victory or increase in strength of the Communists, particularly in Burma, Thailand, or Malaya, would greatly increase the morale and prestige of the Viet Minh in Indochina.

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